NCA
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PRIMARY HEALTH CARE CONFERENCE

ANNCR:

GETTING DECENT HEALTH CARE TO PEOPLE AMOUNTS TO MORE THAN HANDING OUT PILLS. HOW TO DO THE JOB PROPERLY IS THE THEME OF A CONFERENCE NOW UNDERWAY IN ALMA ATA, THE CAPITAL OF THE SOVIET STATE OF KAZAKSTAN. RICHARD KILIAN HAS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT FROM WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION HEADQUARTERS IN GENEVA.

VOICE:

THE ORGANIZERS OF THE CONFERENCE ON PRIMARY HEALTH CARE -- THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION AND THE UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S EMERGENCY FUND -- ARE TRYING TO STIR AWARENESS AMONG GOVERNMENTS OF THE PROBLEM OF HELPING PEOPLE TO RECEIVE AT LEAST MINIMAL HEALTH CARE.

AMERICAN SENATOR EDWARD KENNEDY PUT THE MATTER CLEARLY IN A SPEECH TO THE CONFERENCE WHEN HE SAID THAT EVEN IN WARTIME NO NATION WOULD TOLERATE DEATHS FROM DISEASES WHICH CAN BE TREATED OR PREVENTED ENTIRELY.

THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION HAS SAID REPEATEDLY THAT THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF THE WORLD'S RURAL AND URBAN POOR DO NOT NEED MODERN, SOPHISTICATED MEDICAL TECHNIQUES, THAT SUCH TECHNOLOGY DOES NOT REALLY SERVE THEIR NEEDS.

SPEAKER AFTER SPEAKER IN ALMA ATA ECHOED THE BELIEF THAT GOOD HEALTH STARTS WITH CLEAN WATER, NUTRITIOUS FOOD, PROPER SANITATION, DECENT HOUSING AND, MOST IMPORTANTLY, THE VACCINATION OF CHILDREN.

OVER FIFTEEN MILLION CHILDREN LESS THAN FIVE YEARS OLD DIE EACH YEAR IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD BECAUSE THEY DO NOT HAVE SUCH BASIC PROTECTIONS.

AT THE SAME TIME EIGHTY PERCENT OF THE WORLD'S POPULATION GETS NO MEDICAL CARE AT ALL.

THE CONFERENCE HAS BROUGHT TOGETHER SEVEN HUNDRED DELEGATES FROM ONE HUNDRED FORTY NATIONS IN THE LENIN PALACE IN ALMA ATA. THEY ARE PEOPLE OF INFLUENCE.

DOCTOR HALFDAN MAHLER, THE HEAD OF THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION, HAS ASKED THEM TO DRAW UP, IN THE NEXT TWO YEARS, THEIR OWN STRATEGIES FOR PROVIDING PRIMARY HEALTH CARE TO THE MOST DISADVANTAGED MEMBERS OF THEIR SOCIETIES. HE WOULD LIKE THOSE STRATEGIES TO BE CUSTOM DESIGNED TO FIT THE DEVELOPMENT STAGE OF EACH NATION.

ONLY THEN, HE ARGUES, CAN PLANS BE MADE FOR GLOBAL ACTION TO BRING PRIMARY HEALTH CARE TO EVERYONE IN THE WORLD BY THE YEAR TWO THOUSAND.

BEHIND THE THINKING OF MEN LIKE DOCTOR MAHLER IS THE BELIEF THAT MEDICINE HAS GONE TOO FAR IN THE DEVELOPED WORLD TO BE OF MUCH VALUE TO THE RURAL AND URBAN POOR. HE ALSO FEELS THAT IT IS BECOMING EVEN TOO EXPENSIVE FOR SOME PEOPLE IN DEVELOPED COUNTRIES.

PRINCESS ASHRAF PAHLEVI OF IRAN, A CONFERENCE VICE PRESIDENT, PICKED UP THIS THEME BY WARNING DEVELOPING NATIONS AGAINST IMPORTING WHAT SHE CALLED READY-MADE HEALTH CARE SOLUTIONS.

HEALTH SERVICES, SHE SAID, MUST BE DECENTRALIZED AND DELEGATED TO THE COMMUNITIES ON A DEMOCRATIC BASIS OUTSIDE THE CONTROL OF LOCAL CHIEFS AND LANDOWNERS.

THE CHILDREN'S EMERGENCY FUND CHIEF, HENRI LABOUISSE, MADE THE POINT THAT THE STRATEGY INVOLVED IS NOT ONE OF SPREADING CURRENT SERVICES OUTWARD BUT RATHER BEGINNING TO BUILD NEW ONES FROM THE OTHER END -- WHERE THEY DO NOT EXIST.

THIS CONCEPT IS DIFFICULT TO ACCEPT FOR SOME HEALTH OFFICIALS WHO BELIEVE THAT ALL HEALTH-CARE PLANS NEED QUALIFIED MEDICAL SUPERVISION. YET THE DEVELOPING WORLD IS SHORT ON DOCTORS. MANY OF THEM EMIGRATE TO THE RICHER NATIONS RATHER THAN FACE THE IMMENSE HEALTH PROBLEMS IN RURAL AREAS AT HOME.

ASIDE FROM WIDENING THE AWARENESS OF THE PROBLEM, THE CONFERENCE IS EXPECTED TO ENDORSE A BROAD APPROACH LINKING SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TO WHAT EVERYONE CONSIDERS A FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHT -- THE RIGHT TO A FAIR CHANCE IN LIFE THROUGH A MINIMUM OF GOOD HEALTH.

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